

# The Lark's Song

## A Beckoning to Freedom

By Zacarias Negrón

Ephemeral. Wispy clouds dotted the air as chunks of creamy mozzarella populate the face of a margherita pizza. They hurried, rushing hundreds of miles per hour in the stratosphere above, behaving as if in a state of perpetual tardiness to some fantastical gala unbeknownst to humanity far below. The sun with her luscious rays dipped toward the horizon beckoning the last pangs of warmth and light leave alongside her. They too retreated in a hurried rush, leaving the earth dark, huddled, and cool. Heeding the call to nocturnal abandon, animals of all array found themselves leaping, scurrying, and burrowing their way to the seclusion of darkness. Each as if calling to another, found themselves united in the pursuit of quiet and rest. Even the flowers, as if bowing in reverence, lowered their gaze. Lilies, tulips, and clumps of babies' breath shuddered, retracting their petals ever so slightly. Their pageant lights dimmed, and they exited stage-left. A day, that transient cycle of luminous life had ended. Nature's curfew had begun.

As darkness enraptured the earth and her inhabitants, cooing softly the command to retire, all but one creature resisted the call. The fox, its character better known by the adjectives that precede it – sly, cunning, devious, wily,

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fantastic – broke rank with his compatriots, escaping the grasp of their monotony. He dashed between centenarian maple trees of sugar, red, and black variety, their trunks granted miniature tufts of his shedding coat. Their great branches dipped down in expressions of muted disapproval. The fox rushed onward. He jostled against a growing flow of animals rushing towards the great forest, each imparting a condemnatory glare. None scoffed audibly, yet their faces shone with rebuke. He was one of their own kind, a forest mammal. None, save the squalid few, had ever dared ignore nature’s call. This fox, they each concluded, was naught but a lunatic. The irony of this word’s presence in their psyche and the rapid appearance of the moon’s rise over the horizon was lost on them.

Nature’s masses, their minds enthralled by their own nightly regime mulled one question – why? Why should the fox choose to neglect hearth and home in defiance of nature’s most primordial passions? The answer lie within the gilded words of a trespassing lark. The lark, accompanied by satin sheen, was watched just hours before by the fox. It lit upon the sodden shore of a pond deep within the forest, pausing its migratory journey for a draught of water. A stranger to the forest, it belted out a tune of siren-like quality, “For freedom, for light, for fullness therein – break free, run forth, and frolic again! A fig and its flavor are all you shall need – a flower unbloomed and all of its seed.”

The wizened fowl raised its beak still glistening with life’s sustenance, flit its wings, and swooped above the canopy of the forest. The fox found himself suddenly entranced by the lark’s song, unable to abolish the image of a resplendent fig from his mind. That was it. He endeavored to ‘break free, run forth, and

frollic' that very night. And, so began the fox's bout with rebellion.

As he bid adieu to the maple groves he called home, the fox galloped onward ever increasing in fervor to see this famed fig. Something beckoned him from without the forest. Somehow he was certain the fig would be found in the dour cloister of brickwork just beyond the confines of nature's home.

A deep darkness loomed before him, and suddenly grew darker. The moon in its palace above shone with gaudy repose, yet forsook to provide the fox any light. The outlying trees lurched towards one another, complicating the fox's course. Nature was inhaling sharply, preparing to swallow the awakened fox whole. His paws disappeared from under him, trees faded into obsidian blackness, his sight – lost.

Suddenly, an object fell to the forest floor with a thud. Black and elongated, the fox groped along the leafen floor for the austere object. His paw stopped upon the hilt of a black rod, capped with a lens of crystal. He stopped. Was that the flitting of wings and the lark's song that he heard far above? Or was this yet another of nature's distractions? The fox regained composure, grasping for the mysterious object.

In a flash, a stream of light shot out the object's extremity. It cascaded, flowing over the unfriendly gloom that had entrapped the fox. The baffled creature took hold of this providential lamp, slaying the shadows of defeat with each newly illuminated step. The fluorescent light exploded on the darkened canvas of night as a drop of bleach upon a dark garment. Illumined tree after tree, the fox disentangled the web of branches that so ensnared him.

Leaping through what once lay obscure and insurmountable, the fox arrived at a building of cold, baked

brick. A glazed window appeared before him. Like the frozen lakelets of his youth, it appeared as a portal to another world. At the other end of the crystalline pane lay a world of warmth and adventure. Something other than warmth beckoned him nearer. Beyond the frosty lacquer lay the solitary fig.